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New fish trap will accommodate more migrating adults

WALLA WALLA, Wash. – A new fish trap system now under construction at Lower Granite Lock and Dam should ease handling of migrating adult salmon and steelhead.

The capturing process should be easier for both returning salmon and employees at the facility, which is on the Lower Snake River.

Karen Robison, a civil engineer in Walla Walla District's Geotechnical Design Section, is managing the project, which was funded around \$2.1 million by Bonneville Power Authority.

"The improvements were requested by NOAA Fisheries and the Nez Perce Tribe to help mitigate (decreases in numbers) in the salmon runs and to improve the collection facilities for the hatcheries," Robison said.

While the number of returning adult salmon in the river has declined since the Lower Snake Dams were built in the 1960s and 1970s, the trend over the past 25 years shows an increase.

"We're enlarging the physical trap area," Robison said. "There will be more work area for the people who are handling the fish and there will be more tanks that will be larger so we can hold more fish."

Robison said the new system will triple the former tank capacity.

"Our goal is 6,000 fish annually," Robison said. "It depends a lot on the run and how many fish they put in a tank. It can vary quite a bit."

The collected adult fish can be transported by truck to a hatchery operated by the Nez Perce Tribe, or the hatchery at Lyon's Ferry, to breed juvenile fish.

The adult fish are collected as a selection of them entering the dam's fish ladder are diverted to a tank where they are anesthetized with oil of cloves. NOAA Fisheries employees then examine the fish and place them in another tank where they recover from the anesthesia. From this point they are either returned to the river or placed into holding tanks for later truck transport to hatcheries.

The new work will add sorting tanks that the previous system did not include. Fish will be able to swim from the recovery tank into the holding tanks, eliminating one step of manual handling.

The facility is an upgrade of the former system at the dam, the parts of which have now been removed to make way for the new equipment.

Construction of the revamped facility is presently on-schedule and on-budget, and the work is expected to be completed by March 1.

Funding for the new facility was obtained during spring 2005. The work was divided by two separate contractors. One handled the preliminary design work and the second was selected to finalize the design work and perform the actual construction.

"We started the design in June 2005, and the package which included documents for the design-build contract, all that was done in December," Robison said, "and then the design-build contractor came on board in June 2006."

Lower Granite Dam had a determined construction window of January and February when the various facilities, including the fish ladder, were scheduled to be closed for maintenance. The design-build contractor was able to get a jump on the construction by digging some holes for support piers and working on the trench for a new 8-inch water supply line.

Local fishermen may take interest in the projected Feb. 28 date for the restart of fish ladder operation at Lower Granite Dam.